

**National Marine Sanctuary Program
Advisory Council Information Bulletin
July 2003**

Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary

NMSP is continuing the scoping process for consideration of marine reserves and other management approaches in federal waters of the CINMS to complement the existing state-established marine reserves. The scoping hearing in Port Hueneme was low-key, with about 10 commenters mainly representing recreational fishing and environmental interest groups. The scoping meeting in Santa Barbara had approximately 60 active commenters representing a wide range of views. Scoping input was solicited at the Pacific Fishery Management Council Meeting. The Council recommended forwarding the comments developed in its committees, and authorized an *ad hoc* committee to review all forthcoming NEPA documents. The final scoping meeting, which will be part of the Sanctuary Advisory Council meeting agenda, will be held on July 18 in Ventura.

Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary

This year's coral bleaching event has proven to be significant for the sanctuary, but, oddly, most of the other areas on Tutuila were not as severely impacted. A visit to the site during the first week of June confirmed that mortality in some parts of Fagatele Bay was as high as 50%. Some recovery is being seen, and many corals remain bleached, but still alive. Average mortality ranges from 0-50% for this patchy bleaching event.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere Tim Keeney visited the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. He dove Tortugas North Ecological Reserve with Billy Causey, sanctuary superintendent. Keeney and Causey also visited Steven Miller of NURC where they visited the Aquarius underwater habitat in the Upper Keys.

Coral disease and coral die-offs associated with an unknown condition have been reported in the Upper and Lower Keys. Coral disease scientists from NOAA's Southeast Fisheries continue to investigate the disease-like die-off affecting *Acropora cervicornis* (staghorn coral) in the Upper Keys. An experiment continues in the White Banks area off Key Largo, which was closed in an emergency closure to investigate the die-off. Additional site inspections were conducted at Looe Key June 30th and July 1st to monitor the conditions of coral health.

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

The Minerals Management Service (MMS) has issued a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposal by W&T Offshore, Inc., to construct a new pipeline from a location outside the sanctuary to the platform located inside the boundary of the East Flower Garden Bank. This EA resulted in a "finding of no significant impact" (FONSI) related to the proposed activity. The EA did not address concerns raised by the sanctuary regarding increased discharge of contaminated production water from the platform caused by the new pipeline. The EA is under review by George Schmahl.

Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary

The Working Group phase of the Joint Management Plan Review (JMPR) is coming to a close. Site-specific working groups convened in early June for Wildlife Disturbance, Invasive Species, Vessel Traffic and Fishing. Staff worked on developing and refining the Cross-cutting Ecosystem Monitoring Action Plan for the JMPR. Proposed action plans are being formulated and recommendations will be tendered to the full Sanctuary Advisory Council at the Council Retreat July 21 and 22.

A rare and extra-seasonal leatherback sea turtle sighting occurred May 23rd in the Gulf of the Farallones. Estimated at over eight feet and 1,000 lbs., the turtle appeared healthy and active. The highly endangered leatherbacks are generally encountered in the fall off California, when sea temperatures are warmer.

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

MBNMS was notified by the Coast Guard on June 11, 2003 that the Navy intended to recover a live WWII torpedo containing 494 lbs of TNT, which had been found on the bottom of Pillar Point Harbor, and detonate it offshore the next morning. The Navy originally planned to detonate just across the MBNMS boundary within the "donut hole" off San Francisco, and wished to proceed ASAP as the torpedo was sitting in 10 feet of water just off the fuel dock, creating a public safety hazard. After additional quick analyses and recommendations from MBNMS and NMFS, they agreed to move the detonation site 2 nautical miles north of the MBNMS boundary over sandy bottom in the "donut hole" off San Francisco to create a buffer for sanctuary resources. They also agreed not to detonate if marine mammals were observed within a mile of the detonation site. The torpedo was successfully detonated. The harbor was shut down and evacuated for about 6 hours.

As part of the Management Plan Review for the MBNMS, the sanctuary staff has worked with the public and the Sanctuary Advisory Council to develop plans to address the highest priority resource issues facing the MBNMS. The MBNMS released a report to the Council that contained proposed action plans developed by working groups and internal teams addressing a range of issues. The Council heard oral reports from MBNMS staff on the proposed action plans and have the opportunity to ask questions. The Council will provide specific recommendations on the proposed action plans to sanctuary staff at its two-day meeting on July 31-August 1 in Santa Cruz, CA, after a public comment workshop the evening of July 30th.

Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary

The OCNMS Research Coordinator completed a week-long research cruise aboard the newly commissioned NOAA Ship McArthur II. The Washington leg was led by Washington Dept. of Ecology and the 13-member scientific contingent included representatives from Washington Dept. of Ecology, EPA, NOAA (National Marine Fisheries Service, National Center of Coastal Ocean Science, Olympic Coast NMS), Alaska Dept. of Environmental Conservation, and Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality. EPA's Environmental Assessment and Monitoring Program successfully sampled off the Washington coast. Thirty stations were sampled in OCNMS and 50 in total for Washington State. Sampling stations consisted of taking bottom samples to analyze for background sediment contamination and to characterize infaunal communities. Water column samples were also collected (contaminants, HABs, and overall productivity) and scientists and crews collected flatfish to compare tissue contaminants with benthic samples. This was the first scientific mission of the McArthur II, and she performed admirably, completing the first leg one day early.

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary

Divers trained by the sanctuary in fish identification participated in the state's Biodiversity Days BioBlitzes over two weekends. Despite inclement weather, divers in the campaign took to the water to provide fish counts. Several whalewatch naturalists assisted by submitting marine mammal, seabird and other sightings from their vessels.

National Marine Sanctuary Program

Dan Howard was selected as the Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary Manager. This became effective on June 15, 2003. In recent years, he served as assistant manager. Previously there has been one manager for both Gulf of the Farallones and Cordell Bank national marine sanctuaries. This action officially separates the management for the two sites.

Naomi McIntosh was selected as manager of the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary on June 15, 2003. She served as the acting manager since September 2000.

